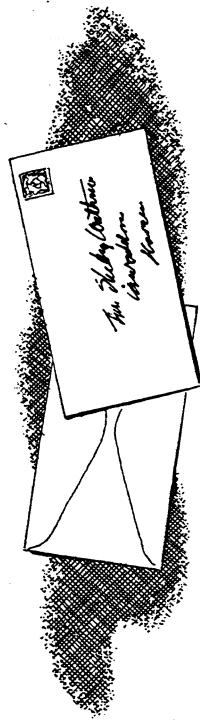


BY AMY VANDERBILT  
Author of "Amy Vanderbilt's  
Complete Book of Etiquette"



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# The Etiquette of Everyday Correspondence by AMY VANDERBILT

## About Correspondence

(Editor's Note: The following excerpts from *Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Book of Etiquette* are intended to cover every day correspondence practices. For answers to questions not found here, please consult Miss Vanderbilt's complete work at your bookstore or library.)

I cherish little notes from some of my old lady friends in their eighties, because they know how to turn a sprightly phrase in even the briefest notes while some of my contemporaries freeze up at the sight of note paper and put down only the most stilted expressions.

If you think of letter writing as conversation put on paper, it's much easier to produce a readable missive. We used to be told that it was ill-mannered to talk about ourselves and what we were doing, but to keep social letters on a high, impersonal level is to make them dull. While the "you" beginning is courteous, here, too, it is usually impossible to go on in that vein indefinitely without growing stilted, especially if your correspondent is at a distance and you really haven't too good an idea of what he's doing or thinking. Everyone likes to talk about himself and is usually more entertaining when he talks about what he's doing and what's going on around him, what touches him and moves him, than he is if he struggles to keep his comments away from strictly personal matters. Gossip belongs in social letters, gossip in the friendly, interested sense about friends in common, about births, deaths, successes, and little disappointments. These are the things you would tell a friend face to face, so why bore him with talk of the weather when what he wants to know about is you?

## **Sequence of pages in a letter**

The envelope determines how a single sheet of paper is to be folded for insertion, in one or two folds. Either way, the writing goes from top down, then again from top down on the other side, never crosswise of a single sheet. When a double sheet is used for a short letter the sequence is to write on page one, finish on page three. If all four pages are used they may be in the usual sequence, one, two, three, four, or the letter may go from page one to four, then be folded flat and balance written with paper sideways down the full folded-out page. The sequence is not important but two things should be remembered: writing should not be written over, Victorian fashion, in the opposite direction, and if the envelope is transparent a protective sheet should be used if page four is readable through it.

name "(Miss) Jennifer Childress." If her signature is impossible to read she should type or print under her signature: (Miss Jennifer Childress).

A man does not need to put (Mr.) before his name unless his name is one that might be mistaken for a woman's name, for example "Marion."

In signing a social letter, sign it with one name even if it expresses joint interest or thanks. A thank-you note looks odd signed, "Affectionately, Betty and Joe." If Joe wants to send a message, let there be reference to the fact in the letter. "Joe and I both enjoyed ourselves so much." Or, "Joe joins me in thanks for the lovely weekend. Cordially, Betty."

## ***Signatures on letters***

A woman should not sign business letters just "Jane Woods, for example, or Mrs. Gordon Woods alone. A postcard order with no salutation could read, however, "Please send 1 doz. Green Star toothpaste. Charge my account. Mrs. Gordon Woods (address if not printed on card)." If she is leaving a note in a milk bottle for the milkman, she may sign it "Mrs. Woods." But she should never sign any letter, business or social, with a "Mrs." or "Miss" before her signature unless it is in parentheses before (for "Miss") or beneath her name. I prefer to see the married name used in full parenthetically, because it sometimes happens that the careless reader imagines that, although she signs herself "Jennifer Woods," she is perhaps Mrs. Gordon, rather than "Mrs. Gordon Woods," as she meant to indicate. It is better to make it very simple and clear by the writing of her full married name beneath her signature. If she is single she signs her

Mrs. Ralph Webster Crooks  
62 Morningside Drive  
Reservoir Heights  
Las Vegas  
Nevada

or:  
Mrs. Ralph Webster Crooks  
62 Morningside Drive  
Reservoir Heights  
Las Vegas  
Nevada

The latter is much easier to achieve.  
Many people follow these rules very loosely, yet achieve distinguished envelopes. Small numbers may be written out—"Ten," "Twenty," "Eighteen." More complex numbers are nowadays put into numerals in consideration of the postman.

## **Addressing social envelopes**

Addresses on social envelopes may be typewritten or written by hand depending on whether the letter within was typed or handwritten. Handwriting on the envelope should be orderly and legible, with names either written in full or initials omitted entirely. Either Mr. James Nathan Webster or Mr. James Webster, not Mr. James N. Webster. If an initial normally precedes the name and the full name it stands for is never used then it must necessarily read, Mr. J. Nathan Webster.

In addressing a letter or gift to a young man under age, use "Master" up to age twelve only. In his teens, until he is eighteen, he is just "John Jones" on his cards and mail addressed to him. A girl receives the dignity of the title "Miss" right from the cradle.

In a social address commas are omitted and there are no abbreviations. City and state occupy separate lines. An imaginary margin on the right-hand side may be perpendicular so the last letters of each line line up with those above this way:

ness office to someone related to a person you have known mainly in business the letter may be dictated and typed.

Informal notes of invitation may be typed, but never formal ones, nor notes of invitation to a small wedding. Letters of congratulation — on the birth of a baby, on a girl's engagement, of felicitation to a girl on her marriage — all should be handwritten. People with social secretaries dictate much of their correspondence, but even the busiest people usually take the trouble to write such notes as these in longhand.

## **Bread and butter letters**

The thank-you for entertainment is obligatory after any overnight stay as a guest and is written to the hostess. I prefer even the briefest little thank-you note to a laconic "Thank you for the lovely weekend" scribbled on a visiting card and mailed to a hostess, although, mind you, such a thing is quite correct. A little more human, something that indicates a little more thoughtfulness, is a note, handwritten if your handwriting is legible, typed if it is not, but in any case graceful and friendly.

Monday

Dear Mildred,

Your party and the entire weekend, as always, were great fun. I enjoyed meeting the Le Beaus and found them just as stimulating as you promised. In fact, just talking to M. Le Beau stirred me to dig out my French grammar again.

Love,  
Josephine

**Thank-you notes for  
entertainment**

A note to someone who has never entertained you before, or with whom you are on formal terms, might read:

Saturday  
Dear (or more formally, My dear)  
Mrs. Goodrich,

We have always wanted to see "High Ridge" in the peony season and so enjoyed your invitation last Tuesday, especially as you served cocktails in your really lovely garden. Thank you so much for including us. Cordially (or Sincerely yours or Yours truly),  
Josephine Mason

Here, because she knows you are Mrs. Fielding Mason, you don't put that information parenthetically under your signature, of course.

Technically, it is not necessary for you to do more than thank a hostess orally as you leave a luncheon, tea, or dinner party if you are not staying the night or longer. But if it is obvious that the hostess has gone to much trouble to arrange entertainment especially for you, it is certainly decent of you to drop her a line of thanks or to telephone her to express your appreciation. It is a little irritating to a hostess when she has gone to great lengths to entertain people to have them depart with a brief word of thanks and not send her any word again for weeks, months, or sometimes years. Yet, that is what happens today, especially in our busy cities, now that the party call has virtually disappeared. But the little party note, even if it is on your card, can certainly take the party call's place if you have a certain sensitivity about such things. Even when you are entertained at dinner very often by the same people, it is courteous at least occasionally to bother to write a few words of appreciation, or to phone your thanks for an especially nice time. And to send a little gift to someone who entertains you often and whom, perhaps, you have no way of entertaining — at least in the same manner — is another pleasant way to say thank you.

Do not, however, send printed cards of thanks for anything. But you may use those charming little floral-decked informals or postcards, so long as no sentiments are printed on them. There is no objection to a penny postcard (especially ones specially printed for you) between old friends if they will speed up a thank-you for a happy time together and if they are used informally. You can hardly put intimacies on a postal card for anyone to read. I'd never use even an imported floral or art postcard for a thank-you for overnight entertainment unless I enclosed it in an envelope, and even then it should go only to a close friend, as others would expect more formality.

#### Thank-you notes for gifts

If a gift is given in person, the recipient makes his thanks then and there, though, of course, if he wishes to write a note after the donor has left, it makes a nice, spontaneous gesture. Thank-you notes should be sent just as soon as possible after the receipt of the gift, within a week preferably. A thank-you for such a gift may go on an informal or on a single sheet of paper or on a correspondence card. No one expects more than a few words, but they should sound sincere and really appreciative. Just the day of the week will do for the date, upper right or lower left below the signature. *For example:*

Dear Jon,

The melodious little alarm clock was exactly what this household needed. Now Al-len won't have to rush to the station mornings without his coffee. Next time you come you'll see what a reformation you have wrought!

Cordially,  
Nina  
Tuesday

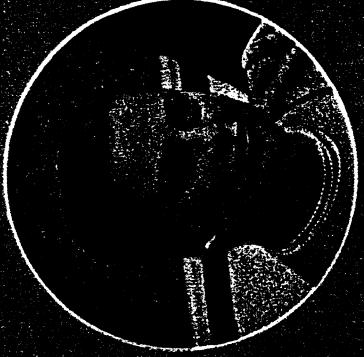


#### Letters of apology

Occasionally there is need to send a letter of apology. Such letters should really be notes explaining some remissness, such as

## Amy Vanderbilt gives her six reasons why a pen makes a perfect gift

Amy Vanderbilt, nationally known columnist, in San and  
million-dollar annual communications Book of Etiquette



**A pen is a personal gift**, yet not too intimate — and, above all, it's useful, as the perfect gift should be.

**It is a gift** that constantly and pleasantly reminds the recipient of the giver through the years.

**A pen may be chosen** that's perfectly suited to the personality of the receiver — as to color, styling, writing point.

**There's a pen for every sort** of person — from the school child to the person who has everything.

**The gift of a fine pen** fits practically every special occasion — from commencement to birthdays to Father's Day and any of the Holidays.

**With the wide range** of Parker Pens to select from, you can always feel certain of giving a gift of high quality, regardless of price.

*Amy Vanderbilt*

THREE NEW PENS ARE NOW ON THE MARKET. YOU CAN GET THEM AT ANY PARKER DEALER OR IN THE FOLLOWING PARKER PEN STORES.

Unlike any gift in this world . . .

or any other

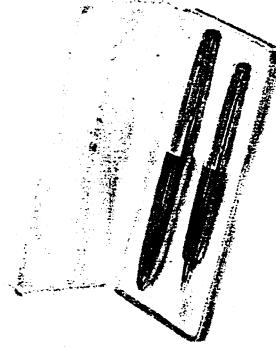
# Parker 61

Dramatically new fountain pen fills itself  
by itself...it has no moving parts!

Newness is the very essence of the dramatic Parker 61, the first really different pen in years.

Most remarkably, the Parker 61 fills itself by itself—in just 10 seconds. And it is filled from the end of the pen opposite the point. There is no moving part at all—the filling is done by capillary action alone. Unusual, too, is the fact that when you lift this pen from the ink it comes out dry—no wiping is needed.

The Parker 61 is the distinguished gift for those friends who appreciate the new, the unusual—quite flattering to them and to you. Your choice of distinctive colors and cap designs. The Parker 61 pen is \$20.00 or more. The set is priced from \$25.00.



**AMY VANDERBILT SAYS:** "A truly new pen is an exciting and welcome gift."



*Year after year the world's favored gift pen!*

## Parker "51" from \$13.50

This world-famous pen has great beauty and elegance—has long set the standards for fine pen performance. Its Electro-Polished Point writes flawlessly without pressure.

Available in regular size or daintier demi-size for ladies. The set comes in a handsome, custom-designed gift case that is reusable for cuff links or jewelry . . . . . **\$19.50 up.**

*The brand new popular-priced gift pen!*

## Parker 41—\$8.75

The new Parker 41 is a truly distinctive pen at moderate cost. It has many of the memorable features of the "51" including the famous Electro-Polished Point—an extremely clean and simple filing device—a visible ink supply. The matching set . . . . . **\$12.75.**

**AMY VANDERBILT SAYS:** "A pen is a personal gift and is always in excellent taste."

"*A pen is a personal gift and is always in excellent taste.*"

*Give the lowest-priced of fine fountain pens!*

## Parker "21" - \$5.95

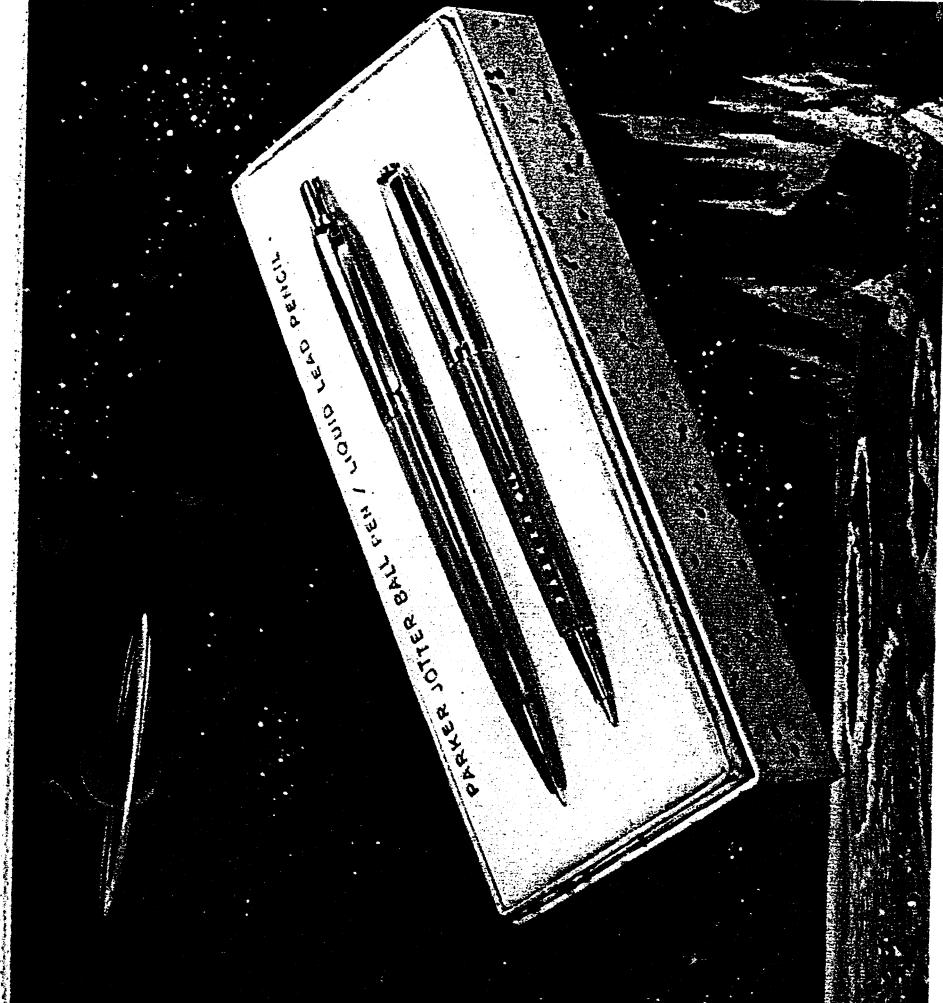
The economical Parker "21" writes smoother, better than any pen you've ever used—except another Parker. The "21" features an oversize Pli-Glass ink reservoir that lets you see your ink supply. It writes for weeks without refilling. Your choice of four attractive colors and a wide choice of point sizes. The matching set . . . . . \$9.90.

*New Parker pen and pencil set!*

## Parker Partners - \$5.75

Two gifts in one! The Parker Jotter — with its giant-size cartridge—writes 5 times longer than ordinary ball points. The matching Parker LIQUID LEAD Pencil® simply rolls words on paper—has a point that cannot break and, of course, never needs sharpening.

**AMY VANDERBILT SAYS:** "The pen you give is a constant pleasant reminder of your thoughtfulness."



they are couched in asbestos phrases. Some of the greatest writers of all times have been able to write the subtlest love letters in such a way that the loved one may read anything he or she wishes into the words. But they are written, too, so that no direct promises are made, no reputations put in jeopardy, no intimacies exposed to ridicule should the letter fall into hands other than those for which it was intended.



the sudden canceling of a dinner or failure to keep an appointment, though telephoned or telegraphed word has probably preceded the letter. Apologies of a more serious sort are difficult and sometimes useless to put in a letter. When some grave misunderstanding has arisen it is better, if possible, to settle it in person, as even the most carefully couched letter may merely add fat to the fire.

A note of apology need not be too definite. If you had sudden guests drop in the evening you had promised to play bridge with friends who were not near neighbors, you would write a note something like this if you had not been able to reach your hostess in person by phone:

Wednesday

Dear Carol,

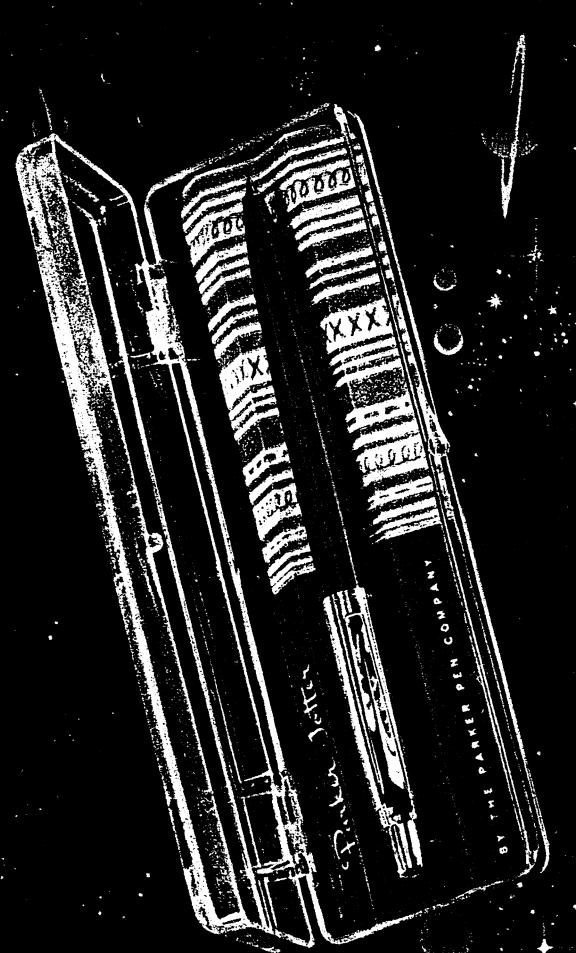
Hope you received my message in time to get another couple for bridge Tuesday night. We had counted on it but had some guests from out-of-town show up unexpectedly just before dinner. Let's try again for next week. Will you plan to come here? Please let me know.

Love,

Ruth

#### Love letters

No writer, author, public office holder, artist, musician, or other person singled out because of his accomplishments is ever offended by your words of praise, oral, or written. He may even be stimulated by, and interested in, your criticisms decently given, if you care to give them. He may or may not reply to you depending on the warmth of his personality or the lack of it. He may actually not have the time to take care of such correspondence, especially if he has no secretary. But don't hesitate through diffidence to express yourself, if you feel you have something you'd like to say to such people. Encourage the expression of such response in your children, too. One of my sons at age eight read a charming children's book by a famous writer who had just made his first venture into the juvenile field. Much to my surprise, my son said, "I want to write that man to tell him how much I like his book." He'd never suggested such a thing before but was quite unconsciously about writing to someone he didn't know. We got pencil and paper, and he printed his own little letter which, with the help of "Who's Who," I sent off to the correct address. Within two days back came a charming reply, which we all treasure and which will be kept in that particular favorite book for grandchildren to enjoy, too. (Stuart Little, by E. B. White.) I am sure the author enjoyed the bit of sincere appreciation, sent so spontaneously, quite as much as we enjoyed his delightful reply to a worshipful small boy.



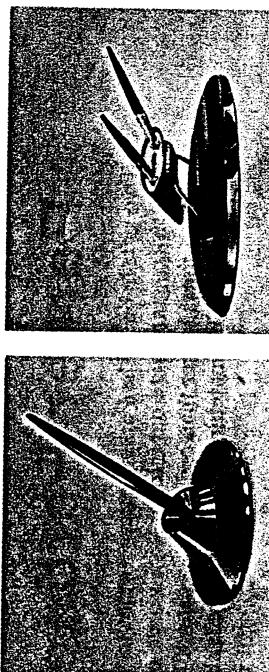
## The gift that writes 5 times longer!

## Parker Jotter ball point \$2.95

Here's the fine pen that outwrits ordinary ball points 5 to 1 . . . writes as long as a year for most people. Wide variety of colors. Handsome gift box.

Beautifully shaped desk set with tapered Parker Jotter set with ball point pen . . . . \$2.95.

Luxurious, sophisticated base with tapered Parker Jotter and LL Pencil . . . . \$12.50.



**AMY VANDERBILT SAYS:** "As you have seen, there is a Parker pen suitable for every occasion. Of course, you'll prefer to give a Parker."

Everyone, I am sure, enjoys appreciation of what he is trying to do if the words he hears or reads are sincere and given without thought of possible benefit to the giver of them. You need never feel constrained to

keep your reactions to yourself. Even the President of the United States wants to know what you are thinking—even if you aren't necessarily thinking his way.

### Correct forms of address

(Editor's Note: Miss Vanderbilt's book contains twenty-six pages on "Correct Forms of Address." Only a very small portion of this material can be included in the following.)

In writing to public officials and others with official, professional or honorary titles, it is good taste to follow certain prescribed forms.

*A Letter to the White House:*

Mr. President: (business) or  
My dear Mr. President: (social)

*A Letter to the Vice-President  
of the United States:*

Mr. Vice-President (business) or  
My dear Mr. Vice-President (social)

*A Letter to a Cabinet Officer:*

Sir: (business) or  
My dear Mr. Secretary (or  
Madam Secretary): (social)

*A Letter to an Assistant Secretary:*

Sir: (business) or  
My dear Mr. Secretary (or  
Madam Secretary): (social)

*Your Majesty:*

### Formal invitations

Formal invitations, engraved or handwritten on conservative paper, are sent out on a number of occasions—for the formal dinner, the debut, the formal dance, and the official luncheon or reception. They are written in the third person and are sent approximately two weeks ahead of time. A formal invitation should be given that much leeway, but not more, as the occasion might be forgotten entirely with more advance notice.

*The Engraved Fill-In Invitation to a Formal Dinner:*

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Smith Prescott  
request the pleasure of  
*Miss Wing's<sup>1</sup>*  
company at dinner  
on Tuesday, the Second of May  
at eight o'clock.  
R.S.V.P.  
4 East Eightieth Street

### Informal invitations

Invitations to informal or semiformal dinners, luncheons, tea, cocktails, buffet suppers, and children's parties may be extended by visiting card, informal, or may be telephoned. If the hostess desires an answer she writes R.S.V.P. on them. Otherwise, it is omitted.

### Invitations on visiting cards

*A Letter to a King (England):*  
Sir: or Your Majesty:  
*A Letter to a Queen (England):*  
Your Majesty:

*Lunch*  
*Sunday, June 2nd—1:30<sup>1</sup>*  
Mrs. Laurence Patton  
775 Park Avenue

### Invitations on informals

The "informal" is the fold-over card, once only permissible in white with black engraving, the letter usually from the calling card plate. Today's informals are exactly what the name describes and can be in almost any color and engraved or printed in contrasting colors. Often they bear amusing little maps, sketches of a country home, or initials. They often contain the address and telephone number of the sender, sometimes are gayly bordered, and may be plate-marked. The paper on which they are engraved or printed is often that used in the household's stationery. Colored inks may be used in writing messages on them. Informals have many uses but can't double for calling cards—they are abbreviated stationery and may be used for any short note (except one of condolence, for their informality—and the gaiety they would have—would be out of place). They may be used for invitations and for a birth announcement. A double informal, with the joint names, may be used for sending and replying to informal invitations. It may be enclosed with gifts and flowers or used for Christmas messages.

### Accepting invitations

Invitations are accepted with the same degree of formality with which they are extended. Formal invitations receive a reply written in the third person on the first side of one's most conservative stationery—never on informals or on calling cards, though acceptances may be telephoned or telegraphed. All invitations should be answered as soon after receiving them as possible. In accepting a formal invitation, or even an informal one where a meal is involved, it is better to repeat the day and the hour, so as to be sure there is no misunderstanding.

Following is a written acceptance in the third person. It follows the same general

<sup>1</sup>*Italic type indicates handwriting*

YOUR GIFT CALENDAR

form whether it is to a dance, dinner, reception, or any other formal entertainment.

## Regrets

In regretting, as in accepting, an invitation you must reply with the same degree of formality in which the invitation was extended. A formal regret usually states briefly in a word or two the reason for the refusal — "because of our (my) absence from town," "because of a previous engagement," "because of illness" — but it is often better to omit the reason when illness is involved, except in refusing a most important summons such as one to the White House.

On Saturday, the fifteenth of June  
at eight o'clock

## informal invitations

When informal invitations are sent out on visiting cards or on informals, and the date, time, and purpose of the gathering are briefly stated but the R.S.V.P. is omitted, the hostess is assuming that you'll come if you can. If you are a busy person, you might at least phone or drop your card saying you'll try to get there. If you don't make it, you've made an agreeable try in that direction, at least, and your hostess is conscious of the fact. Even if you don't get around to replying in time for the event, you might send a card later saying, "Hear the tea was a great success. I wish I could have been there — and thank you, Marie." For such little messages on visiting cards, salutation and closing are never used and on informals are not necessary, although the inside of an informal is often treated as if it were note paper.

(Editor's Note: Miss Vanderbilt's book contains twelve pages on "Invitations," "Acceptances" and "Regrets." Only a very small portion of this material could be included herein.)

